

Cell Group material for w/c 19.3.2006

Suffering for Christ

Getting Prepared

If at all possible prepare for Sunday's service and for Cell by reading Daniel c1-3 and 5-6 to refresh your memory of the story. Use a modern translation, read it as you would any other story and think about parallels between Daniel's world and ours.

Getting Going (welcome)

Have you ever found yourself in a new situation where you did not "know the ropes"? (starting a new school, a new job, even being on holiday in a foreign country) . Did you feel pressure to fit in or were you determined to resist pressure to change? (the "chips on the Costa "syndrome).

Did the pressure ever go beyond people expecting you to fit in and become unpleasant? How did you cope?

Getting to God (worship)

Focus on the unchanging nature of God who accepts us as we are and yet who wants us to be changed into his image, becoming more and more the people He intended us to be.

Getting to Grips (word)

Do we expect to suffer for Christ? Are we surprised when it happens? (leader-read 1 Peter 4v 12). Why is it inevitable that we should go against the grain of the world we live in? (leader –read John 1v5)

Suffering for Christ comes in several forms.

1) Pressure to conform – Daniel 1 (espec v 8)

What pressures were used on Daniel and his mates to make them fit into the Babylonian civil service?

What pressures do we feel to make us fit into a modern secular consumerist society?

What issues were Daniel and Co. willing to give way on and what was their sticking point? Why?

How do we decide where to draw the line?

What lessons does Daniels method of handling the pressure have to teach us?

2) Pressure from open persecution – Daniel 3

It is not likely (praise God) that many of us will face this sort of "Bow or Burn" situation –though many Christians throughout the ages and throughout today's world have and do face it.

How might S, M and A have got out of the situation?

How did they find the strength to go through with it?

How did their experiences in c1 and 2 prepare them for the "fiery trial"?

How do you think you would react to a similar situation? Would your experiences of coping with pressure to conform help?

3) Pressure from being ignored (the gap between Daniel 4 and 5)

Nebuchadnezzar died when Daniel was in his late 50s. For the next 23 years we hear nothing about him – from effective Prime Minister he is relegated to a backwater of the Babylonian bureaucracy. Being ignored is not the same as being incinerated – but it lasts longer.

How much do you think the current secular environment deals with the church by ignoring it? (N.B. the secular world is hostile to all religion – just as Daniel and Co. were caught up in c2 by Nebuchadnezzar's quality control test on his magicians, enchanters, sorcerers and astrologers in c2. We may not think we have much in common with other "world faiths" – but at least they have a faith in something greater than human ability and rights)

Why does being ignored hurt?

What temptations do we face when we are ignored like this?

How do we keep going? (Daniel 6 v 10 suggests at least part of the answer)

4) Pressure from the hatred of others (Daniel 6)

Darius was the victim of his own spin doctors (v6-9) rather than the villain. It was Daniel's colleagues who were out to get him (vs 3-4).

Why do people dislike Christians? (do they ever have justifiable excuse for this...?)

How do we react when we are "got at" for doing right?

Does 1 Peter 4 12-19 help?

Does anyone in the group have any direct experience of this sort of suffering?

Getting Real (witness)

How will this look at suffering for Christ help you understand the reactions of the world to us?

(for personal reflection) Are you worth persecuting?

Spend some time praying for any of the group who are under pressure for their faith and for Christians throughout the world who are being persecuted.

Notes for Leaders

- 1) It is not feasible to read all the Daniel material on the night -hence the need to do it in advance. Please encourage you group to do this at the previous week's meeting.
- 2) You can't cover all of this material and still get home before midnight!. Some aspects of suffering for Christ will be more relevant for some groups than others.
- 3) One aim of the session should be to enable people to understand the sort of suffering they are likely to face in 21st century Lincolnshire – so section 2 is (for the present) less relevant for us.
- 4) Try and ensure people understand what our resources are for coping with suffering
 - firm foundations (c1 v8)
 - firm friendship with other Christians c2 v 17-18)
 - firm faith in the power and love of God (c3 v 16-18)
 - firm fellowship with God himself (c6 v10)

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